

PATH TO PEACE

(In relevance to the ethnic Issue)

Speeches Delivered at a Seminar

Held on 27th December 1993

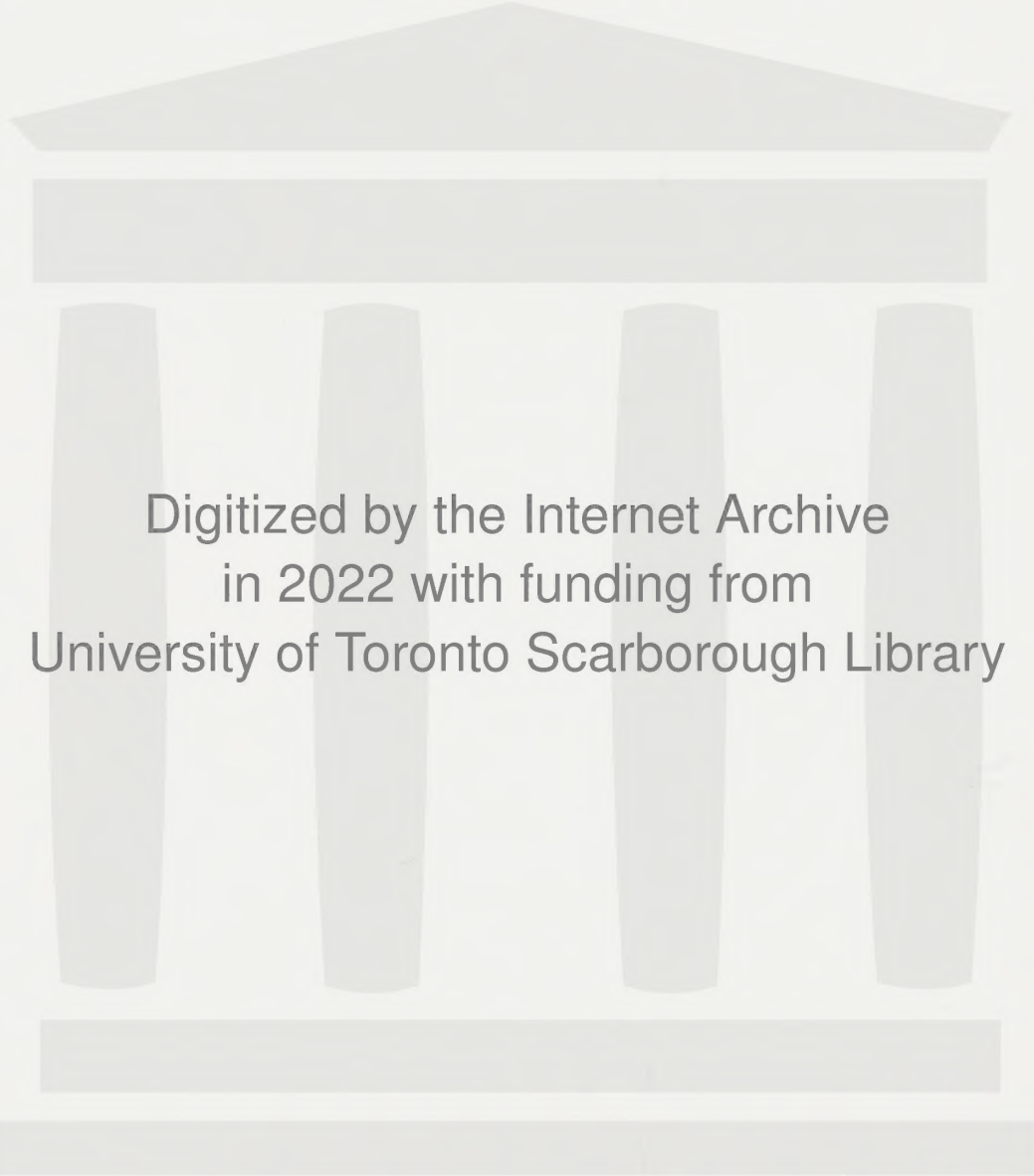
at

Fayawardena Cultural Centre

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Minutes of the Seminar on "PATH TO PEACE" (in relevance to the Ethnic Issue) Organised by the NORTH EAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY and held at the Jayawardana Cultural Centre on the 27th of December 1993 at 5.00 p.m.

This seminar, although scheduled to start at 5.00 p.m was delayed by half an hour due to various reasons, and the Chairman Mr. Izeth Hussein, earlier of the Foreign Services Department and later an Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Philipines, commenced the proceedings of the meeting at 5.30 p.m with his Address from the Chair.

After his speech, the Chairman called upon Ven. Baddegama Samitha Thero, of Dutugemunu Viharaya, Sandarawala, Baddegamma, and a former visiting Lecturer at Lancaster University U.K., to light the "Lamp of Peace" and deliver his speech. He addressed the meeting for about 30 minutes.

The Chairman next called upon Rev. Tissa Balasuriya O.M.I of the Centre for Society and Religion to address the Seminar. He spoke for about 20 minutes.

The next speaker was Dr. Jayadev Uyangoda of the Political Science Department of the University of Colombo who spoke for about 20 minutes.

Mr. Rohan Gunaratna, author of "Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka" and other books was the next speaker spoke for about 20 minutes.

He was followed by Mr. Jegan Perera, a Journalist and Sarvodaya worker, who spoke for about 20 minutes.

Two speakers scheduled to speak could not be present. They were Mr. Dayan Jayatileka, a Journalist, who could not speak at the Seminar due to a sore throat and Prof. K. Sivathamby of the University of Jaffna who could not reach Colombo in time, due to unusually heavy rains in Jaffna.

Dr. Packiyasothy Saravanamuthu visiting Lecturer University of Southampton and Bandaranike Memorial Centre for International Studies, who at short notice agreed to speak on behalf of Prof. K. Sivathamby, spoke next for about 20 minutes.

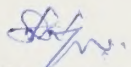
He was followed by Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam, an authority on constitutions. He spoke for about 20 minutes.

The invitees and speakers were served with cool drinks.

As there was hardly any time left for any discussions, the Chairman requested Mr.D.P. Agasthiyan, President of NEEDS to propose the Vote of Thanks.

The meeting ended with the Vote of Thanks.

Secretary NEEDS


Signature

Date

(Copies of speeches delivered at the Seminar are attached.)

Ladies and gentlemen, the subject of our discussion today is the Path To Peace. This is something unusual. Normally, we, have had meetings at which, we discussed the ethnic problem as a whole or certain technical aspects, like devolution. In this case, we are discussing something of immediate concern, which strangely for some time has not got quite the kind of, focussed attention that is obviously required. I need not, of course, say anything further about the importance of this subject of Path To Peace.

I would like to make an introductory remark before handing the floor to the speakers. Essentially, that no purpose will be served by failing to acknowledge, recognise and acknowledge very unpleasant facts. The truth seems to me that there is no prospect of a solution in the foreseeable future, because it may be that we have been failing to address the fundamentals of the problem. Now we are talking of **Path to Peace**, not a path to a break up of the country because there seems to be a consensus amongst the Sinhalese, the Muslims, and the Tamils, that a separate state of Eelam should not be acceptable. Now, I believe that the main reason for this is that the Sinhalese people, by and large, are not racist. They have accommodated enough. The problem lies elsewhere. Why I say that they are not racist, is the history of what has happened after 1983. In 1983, there was the so called riots which, in my view, was really a pogrom organised by the State. Thereafter, as you know, the LTTE has killed helpless Muslims and Sinhalese. But there has been no reaction in the South against the Tamils who are living in the South. There may be prejudices and hatred but the point is that they are able to live in peace and interact peacefully with the Sinhalese. Consequently, the situation is not of a sort that exists, say in India, where ethnic rioting is endemic; the situation here is different and, in my view, because of that one fact of tremendous significance a breakup of Sri Lanka should be regarded as unacceptable. But the point is how do we get going on the path to peace. For that purpose we have to identify the problem as that of the State. It is the State which caused the problem which created the Eelam problem in its militant form, in its present militant form, as a consequence of state terrorism after 1977. The first riot so called, is also a pogrom, was organised by the UNP Government of 1977 and since then it took an extremely violent form as a consequence of state terrorism. But the problem is with the state. Now the problem of trying to turn is also to be identified as a problem of the State, because there has to be a basis of trust, if we are to move on the path to peace. But I do not see how there can be trust in a Government, in the State, which acts in a way that does not promote

confidence. Now if we look at, it has been, as a fundamental it was agreed very broadly that some measures of devolution is an imperative, without which there can be no settlement.

Now we have the Provincial Councils but how are the Provincial Councils to function?. We read in the newspapers about the abduction of a Councillor. So how is the devolution going to work? Now, this is the point, it seems to me, that the preconditions have to be established if the problem is to be solved peacefully; and precondition requires some form of a genuine democracy in which the people, the Sinhalese people, who are not racist and are willing to be accommodative to the minorities, will be able to control the state. And that is the lacuna. The greatest problem, is how to ascertain the supremacy of the civil society over the state and without that I cannot see how any programme can possibly lead to a solution. What I am saying is not against a particular Government but what the state has become in Sri Lanka over the decade and particularly after 1977. And I feel, we have to identify the problem not just that of the LTTE and its intransigence but also, and even more, of the problems posed by the anti-democratic nature of the state. I am not talking from a partisan point of view and I want to explain before we go further that no political party is identified with this Organisation and this meeting, so that what we have in mind, is an open forum where different points of view are expressed on the part of people who we feel, should have come to contribute significantly in probing the way towards peace. I call upon Ven. Baddegama Samitha Thero who, is a well known figure in students movements and subsequently, who needs no further introduction I believe.

Rev. Fr., Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman, I feel its after a long time or, in Sri Lanka it is the first time I am addressing a gathering like this. Specially I feel very small among the high-fly intellectuals and also I should tell you that, I am speaking through my experience and also I am speaking on behalf of my people which means I am working among the grass root people. So therefore it is today the NEEDS the North East Economic Development Society who invited me and it is the first time that I met this Organisation. I think it is important to mention that through my experience and working among the ordinary people in the South in particular, I have been speaking and telling people or preaching people what I say now here today and I am prepared to say it in the North anywhere in Jaffna, Pooneryan, or wherever in Jaffna and in Galle in Colombo. So I have to say is my opinion is one opinion. I will not speak one thing here and something else in Galle, something else in Pooneryan or Jaffna or any where else. So therefore I would like you to treat me as a village monk from the South, from down south. So in other words I am not an intellectual.

Peace is the most important theme today, not only in Sri Lanka but all over the world; how to make peace; I think every civilised religion and every civilised philosopher; they have insisted on making peace and people living together as human beings and living in harmony with the nature and this has been the main focus of every religion and philosophy and it is only today scientific discoveries and all the developments and all the theories and everything has developed to so much extent, but still we can see that people are killing each other. Peace is a dream, and now 2500 years of history or heritage that we are holding and in particular in Sri Lanka it is very unfortunate to see that the on going war is killing our own people. So we were told that we should not go on and on talking about the national question because so much has been written, so much has been spoken and now we need a solution.

The President Mr. Agasthiyan when he went to see me, he said that this may the last chance for peace. So are we really going to make peace or are we going to sit down and drink coffee and discuss. In my opinion I would say, I have my own political commitment, and when I have to list the problems in Sri Lanka, if you ask me to list or give the numbers of priorities I would say national question is the key. Without solving the problem faced by the Tamils in the North, problems faced by the Sinhalese in the South, that we have no future and some may say the war is taking place. Few years

ago, they said, people who were pro-war said, that the war is taking place in the North, they felt it is safe for them to speak or live in the South. In my opinion through my experience, I would tell you that in every house in every household in the South, the mothers, the parents are really going through this terrible war mentality. In my temple anyone who wants to investigate into this can go to a temple in the South and you may see many flags are hung all over the Bo-tree. The mothers, they come and make vows praying to save their children who are at war and I would say that the war is all over, with no limitation not restricted to the North or East. So therefore as clergy if we are holding the long tradition and in the Buddha's words, hatred never achieved anything. The war never achieves anything, no victors in the war; so then it is the Buddhist monks and the Buddhist, Sinhalese Buddhists, involvement in this national question has made a lot of repercussions. The recent controversy over "Buddhism Betrayed" and all these repercussions are all over. Where ever you go, people will question; are you a Buddhist? are you a Buddhist monk? so what is happening in Sri Lanka? These are very practical questions people should ask. So I would say that if we are really honoured or if we really believe, what the religious teachers; what our teacher, the Buddha said we should sit down and start talking to different people because Buddha, in His life time He went to every teacher who existed at that time and He went to every person. He did not invite them, he went himself and spoke to each one of them and respected their belief. So we are holding that long tradition of, humbleness.

It is very unfortunate that nationalism grew into this state. In my opinion I believe nationalism is worse than imperialism, because imperialism you can point out. You can see it, you can see every where. But nationalism is more vicious than imperialism and so unfortunately all over the world. But let us not talk about the world, let us talk about our backyard, let us talk about our own people, the way they are living; the terrible war that is going on. In my opinion I would say, this war is between beggars. Beggars are fighting beggars. In my experience the soldiers who are joining this military, are from the very down trodden poorest and they are coming to me, coming to us and they don't have even money to go for the interview, for the medical certificate. It is we who help them and I always protested and tried to persuade them not to join, because I have bitter experiences with the soldiers. The children whom we taught at the Sunday school are now, I meet them in Galle, in town, without limbs. The children we hold as our own children, the children who are from our village, the parents who are feeding us and their children, before they attain the age of 20 they have lost their limbs. For what purpose and this breaks my heart. I would say that the Tamils, affluent Tamils are not many are in Sri Lanka. They may be in London, they may be

in England in U.S. or Harvard and I have not seen many of them joining any freedom movement or whatever they call L.T.T.E or the E.P.R.L.F. I see only down trodden Tamils, the poorest section of the Tamils are the fighters.

I don't want to go much in to discussion about "Buddhism Betrayed" book but I would tell you that many lorry loads of books has been written on Christianity critising Christianity or the God, but it was tolerated, may be sometimes people angrily reacted but it is some fundamentalists in Middle East may impose death sentences. Somebody would criticise you or your religion, but it is not in our tradition; criticism, questioning is a very important role in our tradition. So the only one criticism I have about "Buddhism Betrayed" I have no question about the credibility of Dr. Thambaiiah. He is a well known academic, but it is for us today in Sri Lanka, it is a very emotional moment. It is very emotional. So may be Dr. Thambaiiah is sitting in his academic seat in Harvard, his children are there but I would tell you that only the Sinnathambyies are dying in the North. Sinnathambyies are dying even in the South. So by writing this book, he might have, I have not read the book therefore I cannot go into the book, but I would tell you that by writing this book, he might have contributed much to the academic world but at the same time, it has made difficulties to people like us. Wherever I go, I work from the birth certificates to the death certificates, among the people in the South, so therefore it is my feeling, it is the way I think that I expressed you the heart beat of the people of the South.

I am not an alienated person, I am not somebody who is sitting in the temple and just preaching people to do things, what I don't believe. I preach what I believe. So therefore I feel it is my heart concern. So therefore I would tell you that as Buddhist we have a long tradition of tolerance. So may be a few may start talking about "Buddhism Betrayed" and this is so disgusting and one should not have criticised such a holy religion and all these are nonsense to me. So the only criticism I made about Dr. Thambaiiah, because I am not worried about the Tamils living in the U.S or U.K. I am only worried about the Sinnathambyies dying in the North and they are the real people who are suffering, who are going through this terrible tragedy, I am sympathetic towards the people who are living abroad in asylum, it is not a heaven. The families are broken up. I met one young man in India who could not see his first baby and he was going through this terrible trauma to see his own child. Few days before, he had to flee the country before his first child was born. It is not like something that you are having a glass of beer in front of you and enjoying life in England or United States. But at the

same time I must say I have sympathy with them and at the same time I have more sympathy and I more join with the people who are really going through this tragedy and who can't flee, who has no strength to flee but to fight.

And my experience, we faced in the South two rebellions 71, and 87 and we were terrorised with only these home made "galkattas", the whole Island, the southern part was nearly crippled for sometime by these youngsters. They didn't have sophisticated weapons, but they managed to get the upper hand for sometime, So what I feel about the Tamils living in the North and East is you can imagine if we were so terroised by the "galkattas" the home-made small guns we can imagine when both guns the Sri Lankan Army and the L.T.T.E are at the people in the North and you can't really press them to get their opinion because it is a game between life and death in my opinion.

We were told in history when we were very young children the Tamils are invaders or the Elara-Duttugemunu story and we were told that it is Elara who was the invader and about the heroism of Duttugemunu. I will not let my people down for a minute, I would say the Sinhalese history, the Sinhalese civilisation is not second to anybody else and we claim we are civilised and we are proud people because we never invaded anybody and we excisted so long with different communities. It is very unfortunate, it is the selfish politicians who led their people for sefish reasons, for power, and this made this whole mess today.

Mr. President said in the introduction that the Sinhalese are tolerant people and they lived with peace among the whole community among Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese for a very long time. So it is not the deafitist view that I expressed; we for a minute, we never say that Sinhalese are holding defeatist views and the time has come for us to sit down and discuss; stop the war and discuss, what is the solution. You may ask me what is the solution then, what is in my opinion what is the solution. But I will tell you that there should be a solution. If I say that this is the solution, is it Eelam or is it self determination or federalism or what ever if I say in public now today, some may say that it is Sinhalese who are imposing a solution to the Tamils. Tamils should find their solution. It is our duty, our obligation, to help them and remove the obstacles; obstacles made by ourselves. If we believe that we are supreme to anybody else that is the end of the story. None, no one in the world is supreme to anybody else. The supremacy comes through humbleness, education means humbleness. So if we can understand or if we believe that the people in the North, they are not acting a hollywood film, for a minute, if we are thinking that they are acting a Hollywood film taking a gun and try

to become a hero. No I don't think, no one will enjoy a gun because once you take a gun you know there is another one pointing a gun at you. So it is not something that is enjoyable. So what is then the solution. I don't want to go into the history now. Anyway the ten or fifteen years of all out war, it is face to face war, it is not a guerilla war anymore, it is face to face war. So what is the solution. I think in my opinion we were told that Tamils are uncivilised and that they are black and this and that, we were told all these garbage. I do not believe these for a moment any more. So I think for a fish the water is all important, when the water dries out a fish will die; that is a fact that we experience. The same way I think the Indians misunderstood the Tamils in the North. They thought when they came with their army, they thought they were coming to suppress or make peace with the uncivilised Tamils and we Sinhalese misunderstood, however long we lived together, we did not really understand the Tamils. One very simple example, "the Broken Palmyrah", in one story says, one evening or one night the military, Indian army came and cordoned one area and killed the people who were there. There were many elderly people. When they questioned who they were the military was surprised to see retired judges, retired engineers, retired accountants. How many were there, the retired well qualified professionals. So what I am saying is that the Tamil community in Sri Lanka are a developed community and an educated community. So for a educated community, it is like water to the fish, democracy is very important. So therefore it is our obligation, my feeling is that it is our obligation to remove obstacles for them to enjoy democracy. They are not enjoying democracy in any part of the world. In England they are like refugees. Living in England is not like in Sri Lanka, may be in Colombo, anywhere else they need democracy to survive. People may say, or may be some extremists may say that every Tamil is a Tiger and this is an utter lie, because in my logic no advanced community, developed community like the Tamils can survive without democracy. So let us give them a chance, let us remove the obstacles; if we can build democracy, democratic organisations in the North we can immediately stop the war, and start talking to them, talking to LTTE. I am prepared to talk to any devil. If we can make peace, I am prepared to speak to anybody and I am not alone. I insist that I am representing the ordinary people; the ordinary people don't need this war, it is their children who are dying; it is their precious gift that they are losing everyday. So people are prepared, people want peace. They do not want to wipeout the Tamils to the sea, So therefore I would not propose either Eelam or self-determination or federalism, or whatever; but I am for a solution; the solution means let us sit down, or let us live together, let us forget about the war. My next door neighbour is a Tamil. What is the problem; we have no problem; we exchange things, we invite them for our dhane or wedding. That is not the real

peace. First of all we must recognise the grievances of the Tamil people, the tragedy, the trauma they are going through, we must respect, we must first recognise and respect and on that condition we must speak to the Tamils. There are different groups, different guerilla groups, different democratic organisations, political parties, I think it is not too late and this may not be the last chance. There is always a chance but we should not delay. So therefore I would extend my invitation to every community in this country or the world. It is not too late, let us stop the war and give a chance to the Tamils to decide their own fate, not by the Central Government, from Colombo.

I remember recently somebody was telling that there is no liberation struggle or political problem in the North; it is only a terrorist problem, may be somebody was dreaming something and suddenly started talking; and for them I do not have any sympathy and I will not drink my cup of tea if there is a terrorist problem. A man with the gun who is coming to kill you, you understand that he is a killer but man with a white dress bringing a pot of flowers and worshipping you telling you that you are a pious Buddhist at the sametime spreading vicious, the most vicious and disgusting war affair and advocating war, is more dangerous, because you don't know; the gun you can see; but not the poison pouring from all over his mouth. So therefore I would tell you that some may say that it is a terrorist problem, some may say it is a political problem or what ever, but there is a problem and so therefore in my opinion there is a genuine, there is genuine grievances of the Tamil Community. Some may say they are not a Community, they are not a nation, they never had an economic system, agricultural system and all these arguments are going on every where, they never had a king, I don't accept the king, so I don't bother about kings. But what we need is a solution today, now, not tomorrow, we can't wait because, so much of blood has been, shed. So we have no more blood, it is our heart we should open. Some may say that the supremacy of the Sinhalese, are being challenged. I don't beleive that and to tell you the truth we are non-violent Ahimsa Buddhists but that doesn't mean that you are a defeatist or you are a timid person, that doesn't mean ahimsa, non-violence does not mean that you are a somebody who is a second to somebody else or you are so afraid of a gun; I am not afraid of a gun. I never thought of respecting a gun because I don't believe in it. I faced it, I think we can't avoid it. So terrorism, is more in the South than in the North I should tell you. It is, the elected representatives who are being taken by force in the South and democratically elected Provincial Councillors are chased away. The people who elected the Provincial Councils are terrorised now. State terrorism, this is naked state terrorism and some may say I am a traitor, some may say whatever it is, I am not a holy man, I don't need the character certificate; what I need is peace, so therefore it

the heart concern of the Sinhalese. I will, whenever I go to a funeral, I make the speech and I explain to my people how important it is to live together or to make peace; to think about the Tamils as human being; I preach it and you come in disguise and see what we are doing in the South. I insisted earlier and this is what comes from my heart through my experience, not from this academic or intellectual understanding. I speak here and I preach what I believe here and I go and do it in my village and if I am invited to meet Prabhakaran I will tell this to him. So therefore I think it is not too late, let us get together, let us sit down with open heart, with liberal mind and respect to each other and find a solution, it may be a self-determination, I don't know, but let us start for then only the solution will come. So therefore I propose to everybody, let us please stop this war, this is a bloody war, and we don't need this war, we can do without it; for development cannot be achieved while we are fighting. Development means quality of life; there is no quality in this country; now people are suffering and it is through malnourishment and medical treatment, medicine, food and mobility of the people in the North. On the Human Rights day we may speak about the Palastinians or aborigines or Burapanists in Japan but we never speak about the Tamils in the North. I have seen on the 10th of December there was a big gathering and we had confronted even the police in Galle but speaker by speaker came and spoke about the human rights, but very carefully never mentioned about the Tamils and it was I who brought up the case and I was told by some heroes of the Sinhalese "heroes" that you are a traitor you speak this and that. I said it doesn't matter I am ready as a peaceful person, I am ready, I am committed for what I preach, so therefore I am for peace. Thank you very much.

Ven. Samitha, Mr. President and friends, I am very happy to be here this evening to respond to the invitation of NEEDS. I did not know very much about the Association but I think it is a good and new initiative, that people who represent the North East should take this and that initiative be taken in Colombo, because as Ven. Samitha said sometimes when we speak of peace, we are misunderstood, So those who initiate these talks are really showing courage and determination, inspite of the difficulties. So I would like to felicitate them and we hope that this meeting would bring some practical results.

Secondly I would like to agree with what Ven. Samitha has been saying; the general-trend and that is also my experience, through out the country, where ever we go, people want peace and I see here many perons who have worked for peace throughout the years, and we know from experience. Infact not only in the South. Ven.Samitha has spoken of the South, we also meet people coming from the North and East and they all say they are tired of the war, but "we cant talk" and that they can't control the young children because at the age of 13,14,15 they are worked up and they think they have to go for the defence of "our rights"; and perhaps in the South, it may even be somewhat due to unemployment also.

So I will just say few points. The first is that I also believe that there is no solution by arms. There is a problem, I do not agree that it is a problem of mere terrorism. We are in the J.R.Jeyawardane hall. When J.R.Jeyawardane was in power we met him, I met him, we met him also about the 25th of August soon after July 77 and I told him that he was not right in saying "if it is peace it is peace if it is war it is war." I told him personally that he was wrong, like Bandaranike was wrong in exciting the people in the 50s after the death of the Mayor of Nuwara Eliya, I said that is wrong. That is not the way a statesman should behave, it is wrong today also not to understand that there is a problem and this is a discussion we have had through citizens committees etc; If we said he is a militant, he said no he is a terrorist So we have to tell him that there is terrorism not only on one side, and I think those of you who are here you could remember, I had written this very often, that the use of physical force was begun here in the south. I think my friend Sivasidambaram and others will remember at the Galle Face, and the police looked the other side and the Prime Minister, Mr. Bandaranaike said "honourable victims of war" or something like that. He ridiculed them. Right through in 56,

58, 77, 79, 81, 83 it was from here that the violence began and we have to recognise this, that we pushed people to an extreme position. So it is said that Prabhakaran was some where in Keleniya when somebody was killed and people thought after this we will not allow it to happen. So those who took up violence and encouraged violence and looked the other side, must recognise how terrorism began and as Ven. Samitha has said, it is not a one sided story and secondly there is no solution in war; what ever the results of the war we have to sit down and solve the problem. The ultimate solution is only a political solution, a peaceful solution. We cannot destroy and kill a people. An ethnicity, I am not using the word, race, ethnicity is a reality and as we are independent, the groups within the country want recognition of their rights and there is no solution merely by fighting. Similarly I think those who want to set up a separate state by war would realise, have to realise, that the majority community would not want to accept it, and they can also be guerilla warfares. They can also take up to warfare, so there is no answer. Today there are in the world, people who support, who would like nations, small nations to fight, poor nations to fight till we get indebted. So we must be careful of this. So I would say that UNP has been in power for 16 years; let them go back to their 1977 promises, that the Tamil people have a problem, that is why they have taken up arms; problems of language, of land, of education, employment and now of security, peace, recognition. And they failed to do that right along. So that is why we are speaking in terms of the majority community, for us to realise that, the Tamil leadership also to realise, that, to encourage war is not an answer and I would like to tell this particularly to the expatriates of the other countries not to encourage war because it is safe for them. Sometime they are fighting the Sinhalese and Tamils abroad much more than we in Sri Lanka, they do not even talk to each other and I have seen it from experience. So as the first point I would say that, we have firm conviction that peace is the answer, not war.

Secondly we must build confidence and in this I would like to say few practical things. The building of confidence has failed partly because we did not want to allow devolution. Mr. Thiruchelvam is here. It was Neelan who drafted some of the resolutions of the 1979 Committee I think, I do not know the exact name for that Commission. The District Councils' elections were interfered, they were not given a chance to function. Same thing in the Provincial Councils. So if the Central Government is not prepared to allow the Provincial Councils even in the South to function, if the Central Government does not give finances adequately and does not give powers, there will be no confidence

in devolution. So this is the test to some extent. The functioning of the Provincial Councils; it failed in the North and East, but at least here, and in this I think we must ask the Central Government Ministers to recognise this.

So I would go another further step and say that we want more constitutional reforms. This is my third point because there is a contradiction between an Executive President, I heard President Premadasa himself said "the government is my government;" there is only one government and I am the government, my government" he said to his ministers, when he called them for the first time; there is a contradiction between that and devolution. So there was a movement for the reform of the constitution. The 1978 constitution, it has now been somewhat subdued because we have a President who is smiling and fine, but that is not enough, you cannot go by personalities. The constitution does not give power to the ministers, the constitution makes it difficult to devolve powers to the localities and within the constitution the officials have lot of power; some officers can sell whole institutions without anybody questioning, even at a loss to the country; those must be checked. Without the reform of the Central Constitution I think it would be difficult to have meaningful devolution. So I would like to suggest that, that process of constitutional change be not forgotten. I think the President was even at one stage favourable for constitutional change. So we must have some form of government in which the cabinet has also responsibility on its own right, not without being derived merely from the President.

Another point that I would like to mention in this connection is the emergency rule we have in Sri Lanka. In two years time we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of a government by emergency, from 1971 more or less. Anybody under about forty years, have not lived an adult life, as a truly free citizen, who cannot be arrested without due reason etc. etc. the things that were mentioned earlier. So we have to ask this. What is the necessity for such an emergency government. Because it has a corrupting influence on the powers that be, one tends to legislate by emergency, to control even leaflets by emergency; the police, the armed forces, the security forces get used to power, so they tell very freely "be careful, you know I can take you and I can lock you up, know what we are doing, you can't talk like that" and it has the other side, the reaction of the people, of the militants. So when you govern by emergency there is also the tendency for people to take to violence. So we have to ask this very seriously; merely because the government is having ensured majority, it should not take it too easy; Government by emergency regulation is not helpful for building confidence, not helpful for educating the security forces, and ultimately they also die; they are also the victims; their whole

psychology also gets affected; so you can't have a permanent emergency and the free functioning of democracy; and as Ven. Samitha said without democracy you cannot have a peaceful solution; so this is the problem for both the North and the South.

The next point I would like to say is that the political leadership, like all of us, must take their share of responsibility. For the last at least 25 years or 30 years, it is they who have been refusing a solution. In 1957 it is a fact that if the B.C.Pact was accepted we would have been a different type of country today, and that was rejected by one political party then in 65 again a solution was rejected by a political party, another political party; So they must take the responsibility and we have to tell them that it is their responsibility, in conscience, you have ruled this country, you have been Government and Opposition and may be the other leadership, you have brought this war on the people and the poor people are dying, as Ven. Samitha said, and I would like to add that many of those who speak of war and fighting, their children don't go to war, there is no danger for them, whatever their race or their ethnic composition? So the political leadership; it is about time now; So I would like to appeal to all political parties, can you please at the next general elections, when you make the manifestos, in the next few months, please put down that we want a peaceful solution, we want to negotiate with all the groups, please say that and you will see that the people are not against you; do not try to win elections by taking militant approaches. So I would like to appeal to all the political parties, please make reparation for what agony, injustice, destruction you have brought on our people. I have written this personally, open letters to political leaders, so it is not a secret. They have brought curses on our people because of their power hunger.

They have no solution, except to bring more and more arms, and that is another aspect that we have to think of. Our public debt is increasing each year because our military expenditure is increasing. If my figures are correct in 1983 it was only 1.8 billion and it increases; now its....Rs. 27 Billion.

Then there also appears to be a relationship between the open economy and the civil war. Please look into this, there is a co-incidence. 1977 open economy. 1977 riots; referendum not held for the sake of the open economy, 83 riots, and going on; so that there is a reason because the open economy opens the country to the other, so the people who have produced onions, chillies and grapes etc they do not have a market, the others have; so one reason for the difficulty, of the people in the North like the education problem or the employment problem and this made things worse after 1977;

and secondly we are fighting over land and colonisation, but giving lands to the others, we are giving thousands of acres of land to foreign companies; we are handing over our plantation perhaps first to private and may be to foreign companies; we are giving our lands for hotels and golf links etc. giving those and ultimately forced to give our industries also because we are getting into debt; so its a foolishness on our part, we fight for land, for position and we are handing over our capital to buy arms, a folly on both sides; So we have to question this; is there a direct relationship or not between the open economy and the war. Ofcourse some would say that we could afford the war because of the open economy. No, the debt is there, because we are given money, they give us money to buy and we buy a good deal of arms; it is interesting to find out how much of the aid that is given, goes back both for arms as well as for payment of debt and the servicing of the debt; so these are questions that I would like the group to reflect on.

Then of course, those of us who are from the religions must make very clear that the answer is peace and I am glad that many monks nowadays are clearly saying that the solution has to be peaceful; so I think there is a need for the media, for the education, to come up and this is the last point that I would like to say that it could be good and necessary if the people now begin to talk, to express themselves. It is enough, war and peace are too serious to be left to politicians or to be left to the militants and the military, they are far too serious. Unfortunately ordinary people have not yet voiced their sentiments and opinion strongly enough, so can we have some such voice coming from here, all Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and others, from groups like this, clearly tell them that you are wrong, to both sides in killing each other and destroying our country and ourselves. So can a movement like that come up and that would express itself in the media, through the drama, through education. So this is what I would like. If the Chair Person would see and the Organisers in addition to our talking, those assembled here also would come to some action. There are lot of persons here who have experience in public life and from many movements, let the movements begin to express themselves, and there is a role for people's movements, for non-Governmental Organisations, and to express themselves and say very clearly, "we want change, change in the political system, constitutional reform, devolution, the economy to be much more in the our hand and for our people and that we accept one another as human beings, and we want to live in peace." May your efforts be successful and in a little way we can, we would certainly do what we can do to help you Thank you.

MR. ROAHAN GUNARATNE: -

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, today we are gathered here to discuss how best peace can be achieved in Sri Lanka. I am particularly pleased to see the representatives of some of the militant groups and political parties, present at this meeting. I would like to congratulate the office bearers of **NEEDS** and the organisers of this meeting and its Chairman for having invited me to address you. I want to spend the next 20 minutes accessing the peace initiatives of the past, the prospects of peace today and make up few projections for the future.

Even though our good President has said that there is no ethnic problem but only a terrorist problem, I would like to draw your attention to two pacts the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957 and the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1965, especially designed to recognise the rights of the minority Tamils. Unfortunately due to pressure from the Sinhala lobby, both pacts were abrogated. It was this, coupled with issues of standardisation of education and the Republican Constitution which generated the cycle of violence and the counter violence which we are witnessing now. It has steadily risen from 1972 with the formation of the Tamil Manavar Peravai the first Tamil youth group which indulged in violence; two years after, the TNT the Tamil New Tigers and the LTTE which succeeded this group. Today the LTTE which had a strength of something like 22 members in 1979, has grown steadily to well over 12,000 cadres at present. The Sri Lanka experience is a unique experience because the politicians and bureaucrats continue to watch the rise of militancy in the north east and there were some attempts made at peace initiatives, but the initiatives were somehow not successful for a number of reasons. Most of the initiatives, after 1983 were with Indian mediation and assistance. To go back to history, we had Annexure C and the Round Table Conference in 1983, the All Party Conference 1984, the Thimbu talks in 85. The Thimbu talks were significant because that is the first time the Sri Lankan Government agreed to talk with Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups. Hitherto they had been only dealing with the TULF; then the Political Parties Conference, the Bangalore meeting and the proposals of December 1986 culminating in the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987. You all know that the accord, one of the main reasons the accord did not work well with the LTTE was because the accord was somewhat thrust up on them, were forced to accept the accord and even after that there were some efforts made by the Government in 1989, they had the All Party Conference. The Government of Sri Lanka spoke with the LTTE and I believe that it is the first time Government came closer to

reality and directly spoke with the most dominant group; of course there were pressures and difficulties of dealing with the LTTE primarily because the LTTE always said that they were the sole representatives of the Tamil people and they detested when other parties like the EPRLF, came to Colombo for talks. So I would like to say that there has been some measure of work also done by the Government in trying to create, trying to bring about a meaningful solution, even though I would like to say that the people who negotiated had lacked in-sight into the LTTE psyche, or even in general to the Tamil psyche. The three key issues which I believe led to Eelam War II were the LTTE insisted on revoking the 6th amendment because they believed that 6th amendment prevented Tamil representation in Parliament. Another major issue was that, that the 500 million U.S. dollars which the Government, as well as the foreign organisations had pledged for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the North. They wanted to control the budget and the Government was very slow on that and of course they insisted on the dissolution of the North Eastern Provincial Council. I would say that the Government for a number of reasons tried their best to accomodate the LTTE, despite tremendous criticisms from some sections of the people. President Premadasa even though was perceived a hard liner, he accomodated the LTTE and ultimately, gradually there was a break down in negotiations which led to Eelam War II. As you all know the beginning of Eelam War II witnessed the abduction of 600 members of the police and armed forces in the East and as a consequence of the war the LTTE assassinated among many others Ranjan Wijeratne, President Premadasa, Lalith Athulathmudali. I always thought that it was possible to negotiate with the LTTE until they killed President Premadasa and Rajiv Gandhi because I went on the premise that even if the government of Sri Lanka agrees to have a deal with the LTTE, still Prabhakaran will be a wanted man by the governments of Colombo and New Delhi. But still I believe that there may be certain methods which can be used in conflict resolution, to bring about pressure on the government of Sri Lanka, as well as on the LTTE, to put an end to this war and as time goes on; even the LTTE, they are subject to tremendous pressure even from their own people, internationally, and also there is a new pressure which is building up, which is the trial of Rajiv Gandhi. So as for the government there is very clearly an effort which is building up in Colombo and elsewhere in the South, where many political parties, many individuals, organisations are going as they have never gone out before telling that we should have an end to this war. How can this peace initiative be generated? My thinking is there should be first communication between the North and the South. It should be facilitated. It is tragic and infact unfortunate that very few of these organisations which are telling "look we should end this war," have not gone to North and started a dialogue. There are many groups in the North, in the University, in

the institutions which should come to Colombo and a dialogue should be established, But there has not been any such thing happening. I would agree with the other two speakers, most people in this country do not want war but the move towards peace should specially come from both sides. The LTTE has recently expressed that federalism may be a starting point, Prabhakaran is willing to consider a federal solution. I think that itself is a point which the Government should grasp because this is a war which the Sri Lankan security forces have been fighting steadily, since the 1980's and there has been no significant reduction in the LTTE's strength, militarily or politically and it is a movement which has grown from strength to strength. Arguments such as this can be used to enlighten the politicians of today and force them to bring about a political solution Thank you.

DR. JAYADEVA UYANGODA

Reverend sirs, Mr.Chairman, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen. Let me first thank the NEEDS for inviting me to share some of my thoughts with you, on the theme Path To Peace. I assume that many of us are already convinced about the need for peace. And Rev.Samitha particularly in his own inimitably eloquent way explained to us why peace is so urgent and necessary in this country. But at the same time I think

peace or rather the path to peace is not that all easy to find in Sri Lanka. The path to war has been probably a relatively easy process and to extricate ourselves from this quagmire of war is not all that easy. So therefore I start with the slightly pessimistic assumption, but I am not pessimistic about the final outcome. I share the optimism expressed by my previous speakers about our ultimate goal, the finding and establishment of peace, ethnic peace, political peace and social peace, in this country.

I think our task, when we think in terms of a path to peace is how to map out the path to peace and it is an exceedingly difficult task as pointed out, or rather as illustrated by the political debate initiated by some, soon after the Pooneryan debacle.

I would like to spend a few minutes of my presentation to point out what was illustrated by this political debate after Pooneryan. My feeling is that as any other war the Sri Lanka's ethnic war has also produced its own reproductive dynamic. It is a very unfortunate and tragic development. Let me explain what I mean by this reproductive dynamic. The war has its own logic of reproduction and renewal. As Mr.Rohan Gunaratne would tell us in great detail the parties to the conflict have from the very begining adopted a particular strategy, whenever they talk about peace and negotiation. They always wanted to negotiate with their adversary from a position of military strength. The Sri Lankan Government would want to negotiate with the LTTE and other militant groups from a position of strength, position of military strength and the LTTE would wish to negotiate with the government from a position of military strength. Well then what would happen if one party loses in a battle. Lets take Pooneryan episode and the Sri Lankan army lost the battle there; then the clamour here in the South is to avenge the defeat and go for another round of war; so even a defeat in a battle reproduces and renews the war and if one party wins the battle the argument is let us go for one more victory. So that is why this whole approach to the war has reproduced tragically a reproductive dynamic. So it is a vicious cycle. So we have to break this vicious cycle, to find the path to peace, I think we have to break this vicious cycle

But it is very very important for us to see a situation where there is at least a bi-partisan consensus or if we think more in idealistic terms a multiparty consensus for the question of peace. I am very doubtful about the possibility of that type of political consensus among political parties at the moment regarding, peace Unfortunately the question of ethnic war is once again being politicised along partisan and electoral lines. Next year we will have an election, perhaps the following year too. So in the coming period it is very likely that all the major political parties in the south would repoliticise for their own electoral gain, this ethnic question. So I am not very optimistic about the role that would be played by the political parties, in resolving this ethnic question.

Then who will take the initiative to find a path to peace. I think Fr. Balasuriya ended up his presentation by suggesting or rather making a suggestion as to who should take the initiative and Rev. Samitha probably does not like the academic language but I am used to using academic language. I would say this is the task of the democratic civil society; all of us are, I presume members of this democratic civil society. The recent international experience in resolving conflicts, that have been treated as or rather described as intractable conflicts, suggests there are two strategies to find a path to peace; one as demonstrated by the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiation and the Anglo-Irish pact which was signed just a week ago, is that international diplomacy and secret negotiation can play a role; the second strategy to find a path to peace as demonstrated particularly in the Philippines in recent years and to some extent in El Salvador, is the initiative should be taken by the democratic civil society. Now let me spend a little bit of time on these two strategies; to find a path to peace and their relevance or irrelevance to Sri Lanka's case and the first one, international mediation and secret diplomacy. In the political debate in Sri Lanka today I do not think that there is room for international mediation although I have been an advocate of that particular line. The reason why there should be international mediation is that when parties to the conflict as well as main political actors are not willing to come to the negotiation table, then there is room for the international community. Rev. Samitha referred to this great debate on Tham-baiah's book. I think I consider that particular debate as symptomatic of certain problems that you have to encounter and the extreme Sinhalese nationalist point of view as expressed in that debate is that any international mediation sponsored by the UNP, sorry sponsored by the United Nations would favour the LTTE and would discriminate against the Sinhalese. That was a point repeatedly made in that debate; extreme Sinhalese nationalist lobby believes that the LTTE has so much international connection that, any international mediation would disfavour the Sinhalese and favour the Tamils. So whether it is right or wrong that particular argument is there and that particular lobby

which is given a larger than life image in the Colombo press, as Rohan told me a little while ago, is a powerful lobby. So my feeling is that in the foreseeable future there is no room for international mediation in the South, because of this constraint. Then the question about secret diplomacy. I am not very sure about that also because our past experience does not indicate that secret diplomacy has succeeded in projecting a path to peace.

That is why I want to advocate an active and assertive role for the democratic civil society. I know that, I am sure that a lot of you will agree, with me, that in Sri Lanka there is a peace lobby democratic political parties, trade unions, human rights organisations, some academics some media people who have been advocating a peace alternative. Of course we have not yet been able to identify the exact contours of a peace process. I think what we have done over the past few years is to defend the concept of peace and a negotiated settlement, but we have not been able to go beyond that. We are still at a conceptual level, but my feeling is that this is the time for us to go beyond that conceptual level. So therefore the first step, I think to find a path to peace by the civil society, is perhaps to launch a citizens peace movement involving the democratic forces and the democratic civil society in Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim societies, so that social and public pressure could be brought on all actors to this conflict; not only the LTTE and the Government but all participants and I think the lack of public pressure on political actors has sometimes disabled the previous peace processes. I am particularly referring to the Parliamentary Select Committee's, outcome. Although it came out with a fairly important report there is no public pressure on the political parties to come to a reasonable negotiated settlement. So I think we have to expand this political democratic political forces, in all societies, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim societies, so the pressure could be brought on the LTTE, the government, the SLFP, the EPRLF, or the TULF and all actors direct and indirect actors of this conflict. As Rev. Samitha who just left said, the people do not want war but people's peace aspirations are not mobilised; they are not marshalled, they are not channelled towards a concrete peace effort.

The second step would be to work towards a peace agenda. That is, the civil society group themselves should get together and discuss and formulate a peace agenda. This is what exactly happened in the Philippines, this is what exactly happened in El Salvador; the democratic group, religious groups, church groups, students communities, women's organisations, they got together and they discussed among themselves and formulated a peace agenda; they told or rather they submitted to all parties of the conflict that this is the peace agenda and they worked towards that and the pressure was so

much that the actors to the conflict could not ignore that public pressure for peace and the public pressure that came out in the form of the complete programme towards peace and conflict resolution and settlement. I think it is very very important for us to formulate a peace agenda. As I said earlier we still do not know the main contours of this peace agenda, but we have enough raw-materials to work with; for example Parliamentary Select Committee's report, may be it is an inadequate report, it is not a perfect report, but still there is a beginning, may be we can go beyond that; the democratic civil society can come and debate and discuss and present a better proposal, taking it as a starting point because the idea of peace is very much in society and political people respect ideas and concepts of peace.

The third point that I want to make is the peace lobby has to be expanded. At the moment the peace lobby is confined to small groups. We are a fragmented community and it is a self criticism but still I want to make that self criticism; our peace lobby must be brought together. Members of the religious communities, academic communities, human rights communities, professional communities and the business communities as well, the business community has a lot of things at stake in Sri Lanka and I know personally they are interested in resolving this conflict; the business community, I am not, Fr. Balasuriya might not agree with me, I am not anticapital, I am not. They have genuine interest in resolving this conflict. The peace lobby has to be expanded and only an expanded peace lobby can take this initiative. In a comprehensive peace agenda I think it is important to incorporate what Fr. Balasuriya said a political reforms package. It is very very important not only to the South but to entire Sri Lanka. The question of autonomy, further devolution of power, democracy, human rights all these things, constitutional reforms should be incorporated into a political reform agenda; the question of human rights too.

And then I think the second most important point is, the settlement process. when we talk about a settlement of you know, a bloody and violent military conflict, is an infinitely complex task. Its not an easy process and our own experience from Thimbu to Premadasa - LTTE talks has taught us very fundamental lessons. Peace process is an enormously complexed process and settlement process is an enormously complexed process. I think we should very seriously, sit down and talk among ourselves, think about and perhaps formulate a post settlement process; there are many experiences, many lessons. We can learn from El Salvador, Cambodia, the Philipines and Middle East and of course Palestinian-Arab sorry-Israeli conflict. After the settlement you know there can be unilateral violation of the settlement and if you do not want, and our

society does not seem to be prepared to accept, an international guarantor for the settlement; in that case who are going to be the guarantors? Then our own society, our democratic forces, will have to take the responsibility. If we do not want international mediators and guarantors and I think, it is also very very important, and again it is a lesson from the Philipinian experience, to have to formulate or rather to accept to form a negotiation panel, because, I think, to bring an end to a conflict, I think, if the two parties to the conflict would not talk to each other directly, then there should be somebody or organisation or group of organisations that should facilitate negotiation process; and who is going to facilitate that process? If you want to under take that responsibility you have to again think in terms of practicalities of a negotiating panel. So like wise these are some of the ideas about the path to peace we have to take. That is why we have now got an opportunity here, you know, to discuss for the first time the real path. This path is not yet very clear but we have general conceptual contours of the path. So the next step should be to civilly sit down and address ourselves to the concrete, practical and viable alternatives to peace. There is no one path to peace. In this there can be many alternative paths and I am so glad to know that the Organisation of Professional Association (OPA) the other day had issued a statement calling for a negotiated settlement. You know irrespective of or rather despite the extreme maximalist position being advocated by the extreme nationalist groups in Sinhala, Tamil societies there are you know moderate forces in the societies. In the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim societies there are moderate forces who want to seriously, you know, address this question and we usually in political science believe that the actors to a military conflict would think about a negotiated settlement when they are, when they begin to think of a solution from a perspective of enlightened self interests; my feeling is that, the enlightened self interests is still far from being, you know, realised by the parties to the conflict. So that is why the civil society should take the initiative in resolving, or taking concrete steps towards finding a viable and lasting path to peace. Thank you very much.

MR. JEHAN PERERA

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I like to thank Mr. Agasthiyan and the Organisers of this event. I think organising this conference, this panel discussion is a very timely thing, at a time when there seems to be an air of stagnancy as regards the conflict in the North and East. It was only a few days ago that I happened to meet a group of military officers and what they told me, in a sense, reflects what I hear from the ordinary Sinhalese I meet when I go into villages. These young officers, said that the dominant opinion among them I would say, was that they were agreeable to any solution that the government came up with, any political solution at all; the only condition they placed on this political solution was that, after they have been told to leave their bases in the North that they should not be asked to go back again and capture them. They have had that bitter experience but that was all that they said and this is also a feeling that I find among other Sinhalese whom I meet, you know, when you go into a village and you walk in the paddy fields, it is a totally different life from the heated life that we have in Colombo, and the heated life that we read about in the newspapers.

Another reason I am very glad to have this opportunity to speak here is that, it is sometimes unfortunately difficult to express one's opinion in the newspapers because there is a practice of self censorship. It is a patriotic sense of censoring what people think might be harmful to the morale of the armed forces and civilian population, but I think that that is a very wrong thing because in the end if a solution is to come from the people they must be informed of the real situation.

One key argument that I think needs to be repudiated and which is difficult to do in the press, is to repudiate the argument of the need to achieve a position of strength a military strength. It is our experience over the past ten years that positions of strength are cyclical phenominons; when one side gets to the bottom of the curve it tries its very best to get to the top; and it usually does for a short time and then the other side tries to get to the top and basically what emerges in the end is a military stalemate. I think that is our experience for the last ten years, But the concept of obtaining a position of strength; there is another reason for that, and I think the reason is that each side wishes to impose on the other side its idea of a fair solution. That is the reason why each side wants to achieve a position of stregnth. But I think our experience shows that such a solution if it is imposed will not last. That was what happened after the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles; it is also what happened after the Indo-Lanka accord; the

side which felt that an unequal treaty has been imposed on it broke it. I think a durable settlement does not depend on achieving a position of strength, rather it calls for a fair settlement, a settlement that everyone thinks is fair. What is fair does not depend on who has the position of strength. I think it is a feeling that emerges in people after seeing what is possible and what is not possible and listening to arguments of one side and the other side. So in a sense those who black out one side of the argument are doing a disservice because they don't allow that fair settlement to emerge. However the recent development with regards to the Mangala Moonasinghe Parliamentary Select Committee I think, it is a very encouraging one, because without even being confronted with the LTTE on the other side of the negotiating table, the Parliamentarians who comprised the Committee agreed to accept the constitutional arrangements that was federal in form and based on the Indian model. This was certainly an advance over the Provincial Councils mandated by the 13th amendment. I believe it is necessary, for, in trying to arrive at a settlement to go beyond the 13th amendment. I think that the flaw in the 13th amendment was that the entire country was treated in the same way and so we had a situation where the Central Government was expected to devolve power right through out the country and no one likes to give up power and they did not want to give it to the provinces and that also helped to undermine the Provincial Council system and now we have a situation where the Southern provinces which never asked for Provincial Councils have them but they have not been given their proper powers by the government and yet Provincial Councils are helpless in a sense to get those powers because the people are not backing them. So the South. I don't think that the South is the problem as in the North. We have to devolve powers in the South. I think that we have to treat the North and the East as a special unit and devolve powers, specially in excess of the 13th amendment. Now we also talk about how the issue of merger is now the stumbling block and in a sense it appears to be so because on the one hand Tamils want the merger and the Sinhalese don't want the merger. But I think once the principle of devolving federal power is conceded, I am very confident that the problem about merger can be solved. because in any negotiation, even if we are negotiating about the prices of something, people, if they take to contrary positions they will tend to come to the middle; they split the difference. I think the merger will be settled that way but I think it is not simply a two way thing between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities I think the Muslims also have to be brought into that although as the smallest and weakest community they are not so prepared to make an open statement about what they want. They have to be brought in to the negotiation process

Finally my reading of the Sinhala population is that they will not oppose an offer of federalism to the Tamils. In this connection I believe that a neglected dimension of a peace movement has to be brought in and in a sense that is the Buddhist monks. It is very important in any settlement to bring them in because the Buddhist monks have the most well or in a sense the strongest net work reaching into the villages. In every village there are monks and the vast majority of those monks that I have met have been very decent peaceful, non-violent people. It is when they are marginalised, when they are left out, when they don't understand something happening about, that they can get mobilised and if they oppose a settlement, that settlement won't last because they are the ones who are with the people and they can mobilise the people at the grass root to oppose the settlement. Therefore I think however good our plans are at the top, however good and technical, technically perfect the settlement might be at the top, it has to go down to the village level and one very effective and invaluable way of taking it down would be through the Buddhist monks and it is in that context that I think the Ven. Samitha's presence here today was a very good thing on the part of the Organisers to bring a Buddhist monk here and we saw that he is filled with good feelings he wants to have, and I think lot of Buddhist monks, most Buddhist monks whom I have met would share, his feelings except that they have, no forum. The media is giving prominence to the voice of a few, I don't think the media is giving voice to the majority of monks. They are giving voice to a minority of monks. Monks who are very articulate and nationalistic, the voice of monks like the Ven. Samitha is not heard, but it is also there. So as it is late I want to sort of summarise the main points that I wanted to talk about and I thank once again the Organisers of this conference and I believe that the stagnation in what we see outside is really not a stagnation in the consciousness of people because my feeling is that the consciousness of the people has changed. It is now a question of political will rather than a question or more than a question of political consciousness. I thank you.

Venerable sirs, Mr. Chair person, ladies and gentlemen let me begin by also thanking the Organisation NEEDS for inviting me to speak here today. I am supposed I think to replace Dr. Thiruchelvam and I see that I am speaking even before him perhaps. Well a lot of what I wanted to say in terms of general themes and gists I think has already been said by Dr. Uyangoda, in particular, with regard to the definition of the conflict in terms of what its boundaries and what terms the principle are with regard to it. Let me state very briefly that I for one, with regard to the substantial package of a solution to this conflict, still believe that there is even a ghost of a chance for federalism being able to ably assist conflict resolution even at this stage. The conflict in the North and East is not one purely of ethnicity alone. I also submit to you and it should not be seen in total exclusion from the other tensions and other contradictions that affect the Sri Lankan polity and that is my particular reason for choosing federalism as a substantial political package that will be with this question. The conflict is also about empowerment which is about devolution of power. It is also trying to break our unfortunate political culture of centralisation. Furthermore there is the point that federalism will allow ordinary people, I believe, to take greater account and responsibility for their life which is something that we very badly need. It disperses power and holds together, rather than separates. But that is not what I really want to talk about; what I want to try and address myself is to the sole question of path to peace, as to how on earth we get there, I think we can all agree on the need for peace. The question is how do we get there? I don't think that there is one particular avenue that can be approached. There are also variety of circumstances, I think, that can lead to a peace solution. It is not only a particular consideration of circumstances representing every single case. But rather there are variations there on. It is indeed the case that when we look back upon 1993, apart from our own conflict in the North and the East, we recognise that conflict resolution globally has been advanced and in some cases quite considerably. Hitherto intractable conflicts, are now going to be resolved or at least the peace process has been set in trend, that the most conspicuous example of course of this is the Arab-Israeli dispute. But one can mention Cambodia, one can mention even Somalia and Bosnia to the extent that there is a peace process, recognisable, identifiable peace process that is in trend. Unfortunately in the Sri Lanka conflict we don't have one. Now what I want to try and do is to look at North Ireland as a recent addition to this list and see whether there are any insights that can be gleaned from the Northern Ireland situation which may in some way enlighten us. Now I do this in full consciousness of the fact that no two conflicts

are the same, nevertheless I submit to you that there are elements that perhaps could be instructive to our own experience. Briefly what has been revealed by, in the last three weeks culminating in the Anglo-Irish accord, is that since March this year the British Government and the I.R.A have been engaging in secret contacts. The British Government has been engaged in talks with people who they have decided to call terrorists over the years; they have engaged in them, according to them, on talks about talks rather than substantive peace packages. The talks advanced to such an extent that on the 5th of November, the British Government informed the I.R.A that it was now willing within a ten weeks frame work to have exploratory talks leading to a substantive political package. According to the version that the British Government gave and, this I am referring to Sir Patrick May Hue, the Northern Ireland Secretary's speech in the House of Commons, the argument made was that the I.R.A contacted the British Government and said that the conflict is over; it is now time for a dialogue. Needless to say that I.R.A has subsequently, hotly denied this, but nevertheless the version given is, is that the conflict is over. Now there are a couple of points that come out of this which I think are quite significant. The first point that I want to make is, is that, let us assume that the I.R.A did say that the conflict is over and what that surely suggests is is that no conceivable political objective can be served or secured by continuing the conflict; that there is a recognition here of the futility of violence in the prosecution of a political cause and this is something that a Terrorist Group or Liberation Movement or Militant Group whatever you want to call it can make as well as Government, I stress as well as a Government, The difficulty might lie in being able to communicate this directly. Here the I.R.A was able to communicate it to the British Government. It might be difficult, say, for the British Government to be able to communicate it to the I.R.A. That is where I submit the role of intermediaries becomes crucial and indeed I mean the hysteria about intermediaries with regard to conflicts, I find quite absurd at one level given the degree of intervention I mean. I think it has been mentioned earlier that for example our mapping of the economic policy in this country is made out side of it, so, why on earth can't we involve out side assistance, or indeed even instruction, with regard to pressing national issue of the day, that is the first point.

The second point that I want to make is related to the reception that the disclosures made by Sir Patrick May Hue in the House of Commons, the kind of response that they received. Most interesting and this of course is again vitally important. Neither the Labour Opposition nor for example the Tory back benchers either the Government itself or its back benchers denounced Sir Patrick. These are die hard conservatives who have argued and have agreed with the previous leader that the I.R.A are terrorists and

the British Government will never go into contact or never had any sort of association with terrorists. Nevertheless they stood firm behind the British Government on this particular issue. The Labour Opposition, and this I suspect is crucial, the Labour Opposition did not in any way attack the question, the principle of talking to the I.R.A. in the first instance, but rather what was being attacked was the way in which the disclosures were made and the way it was approached. Most importantly as you probably know the Ulster Union is, the majority, the official Ulster Union, is the majority Protestant community in Northern Ireland, who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the British Isles or the United Kingdom as opposed to become part of the Republic of Ireland. They for example, did not either come out and roundly condemn the British Government; rather they gave guarded support. Now what that suggested was I think is that no conflict resolution forces can succeed without a bipartisan consensus. Constructive criticism will have to be made, but crucial vital support will have to be given. Without that there is absolutely no peace process to begin to talk about. Now let us turn for a moment from the whole disclosures on the debate in the House of Commons to the Anglo-Irish declaration of the 15th of December. Here interestingly enough for the first time the British Government has come out and said that it recognises self determination for the Irish people. Further more, there are assurances in that declaration that both Governments will ensure that either the question of Northern Ireland being part of the United Kingdom or being part of Irish unity will not be pursued in future or the Governments will do their utmost so that it will not be pursued in future by coercion or by force. That I think is extremely important. In addition to that the Irish Prime Minister has said that there are sections in the Irish constitution I think it is article two and three of the Irish Republican Constitution, which claims the territory of Northern Ireland; he has come out and said categorically that the Government will propose constitutional reforms to remove what Ulster Loyalists or the Protestants announced, as regards the problem. There is here, if you like the principles of peace being established in terms of an acknowledgement of the futility of conflict in the prosecution of political interests. Now the point that I want to make here is therefore for that peace, certainly as Dr. Uyangoda mentioned earlier, cannot come in terms of a situation of strength and a victor imposing it on a vanquished. There I think that the Treaty of Versailles is a classic example of that. But there are situations and the Middle East is particularly instructive and indeed certainly the Northern Ireland situation too or indeed even if you look at Somalia, where it is the self perception of weakness rather than strength, that also leads to a peace process. There is a recognition of the futility of upon future recognition that pursuing conflict is a sign of weakness rather than strength and therefore there is a willingness to communicate; and I submit to you

that Mr. Arafat recognised it and if he did not come and make terms with the Israeli Government in September, that Hamas would have taken over his political constituency entirely and that Mr. Rabin acknowledged that the settlers could not be protected or indeed even ordinary citizens within Israel itself; a self perception of weakness therefore becomes important. Now what the Anglo-Irish declaration has done, and I think this is what we seriously need to address our minds to, in the end, it is a statement of principle, if you like, to begin to initiate a peace process. It is about what one should do with regard to confidence building; what the antecedent elements of a proper conflict resolution situation is. Now that is what we need to be able to establish.

The second one I think is a question here that it needs to be invested with political capital. All the partners to this conflict in Sri Lanka as indeed anywhere else regardless of what one calls them are political actors and one has to be able to develop a conflict resolution strategy that recognises that they are not going to do anything which is going to go against their political interests. What one needs therefore to establish firmly, institutionalise a peace process and then point out that any attempt to derail it is going to lead to a loss of political capital, turn tables, inverted, if you like, that is what needs to be done. Now that is where I think the argument about civil society becomes tremendously important. Governments and indeed movements are going to become aware that this self perception of weakness, if you like, is only going to be hammered home to them if people turn out and tell them so. This is where I think in the Sri Lankan conflict, as other speakers mentioned, there is a fragmented peace constituency. It is not organised; it is not co-ordinated; it is not yet a political force and that I must state is an indictment on a society which has faced ten years of conflict; why is there not a movement in this country that will get up in the next elections and turn round and say that people should vote on the basis of this national issue; which party they think is going to offer a reasonable solution, a satisfactory and durable conclusion to this and I think in that respect, the responsibility lies on us to be able to do that. In the end the point is that we have to rehumanise the conflict; we have to recognise that the terrorists or whatever insult or gross characterisation that we made of the other person, that in the end they are political actors and political actors are invariably human. We must stop the war and get on to a peace offensive if you like. I think that, needs to change very very badly. The process has to be initiated; once it is institutionalised it is going to be very very difficult to debunk. I mean peace is not going to come to Palestine tomorrow. The ceasefire that prevails in Northern Ireland today may not last beyond Christmas; but at the same time the principles of peace, the whole conflict resolution process, is also not going to be derailed and I think there is a very thin line if

you like between being optimists, optimistic and pessimistic about that and one therefore has to push forward and try and capitalise on the conflict resolution elements rather than each time go back to the resort to violence. So what we need here, if you like, in terms of the path to peace is to be able to organise in terms not to leave the political parties out of it because I think their record on this is quite shameless and sloppy. Therefore what we need to do is to get together in terms of civil society, group society, as was pointed out and organise into one co-ordinated coherent frame and come to a consensus on what needs to be done in terms of pointing out that this country is not going to lose by talking to the LTTE or getting outside assistance in order to stop this war. That indeed, that is a precondition for prosperity for all its communities. Thank you.

Dr. NEELAN THIRUCHELVAM.

Mr. Chairman, the distinguished leaders of political parties, distinguished members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen, we have during the last two hours listened to some extremely elegant and well structured presentation on the theme of this evening's discussions the Path to Peace. Many speakers, particularly Dr. Uyangoda and Dr. Saravanamuththu, referred to the momentous changes that are now taking place in conflicts which have been otherwise thought to be intractable. Dr. Saravanamuththu referred to the agreement with regard to Northern Ireland which was concluded just twelve days ago. When Prime Minister Thatcher visited Sri Lanka for the opening of the Victoria dam she dogmatically asserted the British Government does not speak to terrorists and as Dr. Saravanamuththu has pointed out the British Government has not merely maintained political contacts with the I.R.A and the Sinn Fein, that this agreement envisages a forum for the reconciliation which will include those elements within Northern Ireland who have engaged over the decades in a violent struggle for self determination.

In the Middle East, Mr. Chairman we have seen momentous changes in terms of not merely of the accord that was reached between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government but in the political social and economic arrangement that are envisaged for the West bank and the Gaza strip and for the regional development of that whole region. In South Africa today we have the process of constitutional transition to Black majority rule, being negotiated through some of the most complexed constitutional and political processes, despite the fact that over the last two years more than 10,000 people have died in township violence in the Black townships.

Now Dr. Uyangoda pointed out that there were two strategies that one could pursue in the path to peace. One was the strategy of mediation and political negotiation and the other was the engagement of civil society. Now it must be remembered that even in these conflicts where political agreements were reached apparently through the process of negotiations at the level of governments or at a political level, the role of civil society has been an extraordinarily important one. Take for example in the Middle East negotiation. It was after all a civil society institution in Norway which commenced that process and remained with that process until it culminated in the historic agreement. Similarly Northern Ireland; Prime Minister Major after the agreement was concluded

referred to the community leaders, the church leaders, the academics, the intellectuals who have for years worked through the process, through towards this process of reconciliation.

Now Mr. Chairman despite this mood of optimism that exists in the global scene I think the mood in this country, on the other hand, is one of a deep pessimism. Around May of this year Prime Minister Ranil Wicramasinghe addressing the Aid.. Consortium meeting informed the Donors that there was no task which was more important to the Government than the task of bringing an end to the war and he said that the Government would seek to frame a political solution which will reconcile the aspirations of the majority and of the minority in this country. Now within a few months of this pronouncement, we have the Government reconceptualizing the problem, not only as a problem being described as not an ethnic problem, but it is also being publicly stated that there are no grievances to be redressed and there is no need for a political package to respond to any perceived grievances. Now you can see Mr. Chairman, that this approach to the problem has incredibly contributed to a significant hardening of attitudes, to the growing militarisation of the conflict and the projection of extreme nationalistic view point, which are hostile and unsympathetic to any process of reconciliation. So that on one hand, while we are encouraged and inspired by the political experiments which are taking place in many parts of the world, we must recognise, that while there was a civil society initiative, it is political leadership at the highest level which made an ultimate difference, in each of these conflicts.

So I think Mr. Jegan Perera pointed out that one of the significant obstacles in the path to peace is the lack of a political will, and this lack of a political will, emerges not only at the level of framing solutions but the lack of political will, in implementing solutions which has been put into place. We have many examples, take for example our policy of bilingualism in this country. We have constitutional provisions, we have a Commission which has been constituted for the purposes of implementing this policy but effectively there is no real political will on the part of the Government to clothe that Commission with effective resources or to make it clear that this policy is a critical element in the Government's approach to multi-ethnicity and diversity in our society. Take our devolutionary arrangements which continue to have been eroded, field of transport, field of education, in the field of agrarian services, by Central Government legislation which continues to appropriate power to the Centre and often reduce the devolutionary arrangements into shambles. Now many of these issues are now being litigated before the courts largely because we have in the Western Provincial Council a group of people

who are willing to assert the powers of the Council and draw the boundaries between the Centre and the province with regard to the devolutionary spheres. Now Mr. Chairman, Mr. Rohan Gunaratne talked about the legacy of history with regard to this conflict and pointed out that in many respects the kind of democracy that has evolved in this country. The competition between the two major political parties has inhibited a meaningful resolution and it is for that reason that most of us welcomed the appointment of the Select Committee which we hoped would provide an opportunity for the major political parties in the South to overcome their inhibition and to work towards a political solution which would be meaningful and responsive to the crisis. Now what is tragic about this experiment with regard to the Select Committee is that neither the leadership of the United National Party, nor the leadership of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party was willing to give any clear political direction to its members with regard to how they should approach their tasks. This Committee which functioned for many months were often not able to muster a quorum. Individual members of the Committee of the same political party took contradictory positions and approached their task neither with a sense of urgency nor the sense of the seriousness of the purpose. So the question of political will, again becomes a critical one. I do agree with Dr. Uyangoda that we should not completely dismiss the report of that Committee, at least with regard to the substance of devolution, that there are ideas and concepts which could be built upon in framing a more comprehensive settlement, But I think the approach of that Committee, to its tasks, I think, points to our continuing difficulty in trying to overcome the sense of apathy, sense of indifference to extraordinary human tragedy, that is unfolding in terms of the human beings who are suffering in the war.

Now the second obstacle that many people referred to is the lack of trust between the principal protagonists in this conflict, that there has been a complete break down in confidence and it is in this context that the question of external mediation becomes relevant. Where domestic processes may have exhausted themselves, can external mediation help catalyse the political process, create structures of negotiations in which both parties who distrust each other can have confidence. Now Dr. Uyangoda has pointed to some of the difficulties in injecting an external element into such a process. But the question arises, can we then evolve a domestic group who can serve as interlocutors, who can catalyse the parties, maintain lines of communication, suggest intermediary solutions with a view to overcoming this climate of distrust.

Now the third obstacle that was referred to, is that the human dimensions of this conflict are not effectively projected, particularly in the South of this country. If you

watch our televisions today, you would learn in great detail, about the human suffering that are taking place in Bosnia, and our population is well educated and informed on this matter. But the extraordinary human suffering that is caused by displacement, by deprivation, by the conditions under which women and children are condemned to live in refugee camps and areas where they are displaced, and the human misery that this cruel war, this brutal war has caused on ordinary people is not projected. In many ways President Premadasa's strategy; his economic strategy, was directed towards isolating the people from the South, from the social, economic and even comes psychological consequences of the civil war and in being able to project to the West that the South remains a heaven for investments, for trade, for economic opportunities despite the continuance of the war; to some extent he was effective, in projecting such a strategy, in that you had significant rates of growth, our foreign exchange reserves are said to be the highest in our recent economic history, there had been flows of investment and so forth. But amongst the negative consequences of such a strategy, was that, it failed to create a peace constituency in the South, a constituency which was capable of fully comprehending the suffering and the destruction and the wastefulness of this war.

Now the next point that has been made is related to that, is that because of this strategy there is an extraordinary and growing economic disparity between the North-East and the South. The North is essentially, is literally and metaphorically, an area of darkness it has no power or no electricity. It is where conditions, where people live on the margins of existence, subsistence levels, subsistence economy and there is this growing disparity, economic disparity between two regions of the country, can in itself, be potentially a destabilising factor and a growing obstacle to the peace process.

Now finally Mr. Chairman there were many speakers who spoke about the need to reawaken civil society. In many respects the group of people who have assembled here, and I see amongst many of you, friends, who I have worked with many years, are a group of like minded people, who do not really need to be convinced of the need for peace, but perhaps are looking for clearer direction with regards to how the objective of peace can be realised, Dr. Uyangoda spoke to the need to energise new constituencies of professionals, business community. In South Africa for example, the national peace committee which as a community, consisting of all the political parties and whose objective is to minimise political violence, was set up by the business community and sustained by the energy and the enthusiasm of the business community and the Church leaders in South Africa. Now the task of energising civil society, what is the kind of task that civil society can address itself to. I think a critical element is to try and build

bridges of confidence, of trust between the two sides. Now many of these gestures of confidence, of goodwill have been approached essentially from a point of view of reciprocity, you release the policeman you have in custody and we will relax the economic embargo. I think there is a need to approach gestures of goodwill from a unilateral perspective, unrelated to the response of the other side, and here talking about economic embargoes, release of political prisoners, bombing of civilian targets, free flow of goods per person from the North to the South and vice versa, these are tasks surely the civil society institutions can address.

And lastly Mr. Chairman, Fr. Balasuriya spoke about the need to locate the search for a political solution within the larger framework of constitutional reform, in this country. He asked the question, can you have meaningful devolution in this country in a presidential system where power inevitably gravitates towards the centre. I want to make two points in regard to this question. The first is to recognise an important, particularly the panelists here must acknowledge, that one of the most significant constitutional impediments to a durable political solution, has been the constitutional entrenchment of the unitary state. The late Colvin. R.de. Silva, once told me and Fr. Balasuriya remembers this, that there is no model called the unitary state which is locked up in a heavenly vault with which you can compare a specific constitution and decide whether it is a unitary constitution or a non-unitary constitution. He said that there is a continuance between unitary and federal arrangements and there are arrangements which are unitary in character but which may have federal elements in its framework. But this is not how the legal, political and bureaucratic elite of this country have approached this problem. Concept of a unitary state is not only entrenched in the constitution, it is also embedded in the consciousness of our lawyers, of our judges, of our public servants and this has resulted in a significant erosion of the devolutionary arrangement. Centre-Provincial disputes have been continuously resolved in favour of the Centre. The bureaucracy and even the judiciary sees itself as a projection of the centralised state and not as a neutral arbiter between the Centre and the Provincial. This Mr. Chairman is a very significant factor that must form our understanding of this problem.

And the second issue that I wish to raise is that in any approach to constitutional reform we must recognise that group rights and individual rights are indivisible. It is not enough for a region of this country to have autonomy if individuals in that region have no freedom of speech, have no freedom of movement, have no freedom to engage in political activity. Any approach to recognising the just aspirations of a group must also

be accompanied by the need to recognise the rights of individuals in respect of their civil and political rights, and so I think both parties to the conflict have to have these two key issues in mind in approaching the task of political reconciliation,

Thank you Mr. Chairman I wish to thank you for presiding over this meeting I merely want to end by saying, when we talk in terms of civil society we are essentially calling upon each one of you to engage in a different form; that engage civil society, that can make a difference and in the struggle for human value it is immoral to be pessimistic Thank you.



To Live in Peace

with dignity

and Honour

is. every man's birth right